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ABSTRACT

Theories of phallic authority outlined by Jaques Lacan, Sigmund Freud, and Luce Irigaray suggest that one can effectively undo authority only from a position of authority, a position that traps feminists within the very phallic economy they hope to subvert. Attempting to avoid this trap, feminist pedagogues have made a distinction between "bad" authority and "good" authority by assuming the role of the "nurturing mother" rather than the "authoritative father." This brand of feminist pedagogy remains as much a function of the phallic phantasy as does traditional pedagogy. The job of the pedagogue is to bring and keep student language within the lines of legitimacy. What these feminist pedagogies offer is a simple reversal of privilege, from the Father to the Mother, which leads nowhere new. What is needed is a different game entirely, a way out of the old stories, out of Oedipal subjectivity, out of the binary system itself. A pedagogy of laughter could mimic phallic authority in the classroom in a way that would pervert its authenticity. Authority would then find itself enacted as a pedagogical performance--a parody or pastiche--informed by the notion that persons cannot be masters of a language that commands them. Authority would not be renounced, rather it would be enacted in a way that would expose its illusoriness. It would become laughable. (A 35-item bibliography is attached.) (SAM)

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The Pharse of the Phallic Pheminine:

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There are no grounds for discourse, but rather
an arid, millennial ground to break.
Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa"

With your milk, Mother, I swallowed ice. . .You
flowed into me, and that hot liquid became poison, paralyzing me.
Luce Irigaray, "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other"

We should consider every day lost on which we have not
danced at least once. And we should call every truth false
which was not accompanied by at least one laugh.
Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra

"[T]he phallus" Jacques Lacan writes, "is. . .that mark in which the role of the logos is joined with the advent of desire"; it is the "privileged signifier" (*Ecrits* "Signification" 287), the prime mover, the yard stick for the good, the true, and the beautiful: Anything whole, up-right, and/or unified fills the bill. It's no accident that the term Proper denotes the concept "up-standing." On the other hand, as Torrii Moi suggests, "anything that is not shaped on the pattern of the Phallus is defined as chaotic, fragmented, negative or non-existent" (67). Woman, for instance. She is by definition not proper, not of the Proper; the "terrifying chaos of the female genitals" (67) leaves her in the margins of a phallogocentric society that valorizes the One: One Truth, One Meaning, One Libido. The erection of the phallus as Transcendental Signifier, as stand-in for the play of absence and presence that constitutes language, leaves female entry into the symbolic organized around Lack or Negativity--she doesn't *have* "it", she *lacks* "it." This Lack, many argue, distinguishes woman as Other, that hole (or absence) against which the whole (or presence) of the male ego sustains itself.

Luce Irigaray, on the other hand, would find even this an optimistic interpretation; her work suggests that both the subject *and* its other operate as a closed phallogocentric signifying economy that establishes stasis through the exclusion of the feminine altogether. The reign of the phallus is the reign of the One. In Freud's "phallic phase," only the penis comes into ac/count (is countable). According to Irigaray, Freud as well as society itself are arrested in this phallic phase, perpetually snuffing out otherness in the name of sameness, in the name of a covertly homosexual

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enterprise in which women are valued only as merchandise to be exchanged among men. "Heterosexuality," she suggests, "has been up to now just an alibi for the smooth workings of man's relations with himself, of relations among men. Whose 'sociocultural endogamy' excluded the participation of the other, so foreign to the social order: women" (172). Homosexuality is "nothing but the assignment of economic roles; there are producer subjects and agents of exchange (male) on the one hand, productive earth and commodities (female) on the other" (192).

And yet, none of this is to say that the Phallus does not *get around* to women. According to Irigaray, women *exist* (take on the role of subject) only inasmuch as they can be "transformed by phallocratism" (111). But "[a]s soon as she speaks (expresses herself to herself), a woman is a man" (194). Even if she chooses homosexuality, she does so only "by virtue of a 'masculine complex'" (194). The front cover of Eva Keuls' The Reign of the Phallus illustrates the problem: it sports a naked, matronly figure, running, and clutching an enormous penis. The caption reads: "caricature of female phallic aggression." It could as easily have read: "Dressing for success in the Western World."

Success, according to the phallo-logic of the so-called "masculine" economy, both requires and affords power: the weilder of the phallus is the autonomous subject, author of his own history, master of his own destiny. And women who aspire to success must, according to Freud and Lacan, sublimate their despair over the lack of an Up-standing "member" and seize phallic authority, line up with the masters instead of the slaves. This situation, of course, places feminists, who are out to challenge phallic domination, in a precarious position: one can effectively undo authority only from a position *of* authority, a position that traps feminists within the very phallic economy they hope to subvert.

This essay is especially interested in feminist pedagogues who have attempted to avoid this trap by defining a distinction between "bad" authority and "good" authority by assuming the role of the "nurturing mother" rather than the "authoritative father" (Flynn 423). Playing what Marilyn Cooper has called the part of the "benign authority" (156) and exercising "good" power or "authority with" (as opposed to authority over) this pedagogue encourages what Catherine Lamb has called a classroom of "cooperation, collaboration, shared leadership, and integration of the cognitive and the affective" (11). S/he functions, according to Sally Miller Gearhart, as the "co-

creator and co-sustainer" of human interaction (200) and as guardian against conflict, competition, and hierarchy in the classroom. Lamb surmises the ultimate goal of feminist pedagogy to be a "mediation" of differences for the sake of discovering a "resolution to conflict that is fair to both sides" (11).

While I find this full-reversal of pedagogical performance valuable for many reasons, I'm suspicious about the nature of its accomplishments. In fact, it is my concern that this brand of feminist pedagogy remains as much a function of the phallic phantasy as does traditional pedagogy. The desire to homogenize differences, to diffuse conflict, for instance, exposes a nostalgia for Oneness, for the Proper, for the very phallic standard feminist pedagogy intends to displace. After all, erecting the "big solution," even if *together*, still valorizes the Big Erection. Dialectical communication "mediates" differences by creating a collective agency bond(ag)ed in the act of consensus. But "mediation," as Gayatri Spivak notes, "is always interested" (247). And the creation of any "collective" or totality produces not one but two: Self and Other; included and excluded. Privileging the social over the individual as a solution to domination ignores the discursive construction of "the social" itself.[1] To stabilize its identity, it must separate itself from what it is not--its other. Dialectic facilitates this end: "successful communication," Michel Serres points out, is attained by supposing a third position and seeking to exclude it. "Dialectic makes the two interlocutors play on the same side; they do battle together [against the third position] to produce a truth on which they can agree" (67). And their agreement is the result of their standing together, on common ground, and recognizing that what does not stand with them stands against them.

The loser in the collaborative classroom is that which cannot be co-opted by the collective, cannot be appropriated, *made* legitimate, *made* Proper. And it is against this loser that the winners claim victory, gain "liberation," and achieve consolidation. "Consensus, commensurability,

[1] Nietzsche was one of the first to suggest that our belief in the individual is an effect of our grammatical structure. See, for instance, #16-17 in *Beyond Good and Evil*, where he argues that belief in an agent is the result of the linguistic demand for an actor in a subject/predicate structure. Victor Vitanza argues that "the social" as a collective unit is no less a linguistic effect than is the "individual." See, for instance, his interview in *Composition Studies*, where he argues that both the individual and the social are "bad effect[s] of language" (48-65).

communication," Lynn Worsham notes, "are old dreams of. . .the philosopher and the phallocrat. They are motivated by one desire: the desire for the same mind, the same meaning, the same standard, and the same language. They promise enlightenment, emancipation, and empowerment" (99). What they deliver, however, is the legitimation of exclusion. What gets excluded in the production of any collective agency is that which is *not* shaped on the pattern of the Phallus. It is that which has been declared insoluble, inappropriate, unTrue, that which has no proper name, no propriety, no property: Again, it is Woman, who "lacks" the Proper (equipment).

Distinguishing between good and bad authority, between the nurturing mother and the authoritative father, seems also problematic. No politically neutral nurturer, this gentle teacher-mother advances a specific agenda: to "liberate" students by infusing them with the power she has assumed. Again, I'm suspicious: suspicious of a Mother who assumes the role of Master, of a Mother-Master draped in a facade of "feminine nurturance," a facade that successfully remystifies pedagogical violence. The nourishment she offers is not freely given; it is as paralyzing, as fixating, as freezing as the Father's Law.[2] To be sure, the realm of the Proper in her classroom has undergone a significant shift: it demands interconnection over separation, collaboration over competition, harmony over conflict. And yet, the game is the same. Foucault, in particular, has made it possible to see that traditional pedagogy is complicit with a "carceral network" that aims to create useful ("docile") subjects to propagate the status quo. But, just as the transition from public torture to private detentions evidenced merely a perfection of the techniques of domination and a new ability to conceal them (*Discipline and Punish* 3-16), it seems that the transition from traditional to feminist pedagogies is merely a move from one mode of normalization to another. Pedagogical violence gets camouflaged but not eradicated in these feminist classrooms, which continue to function within a disciplinary matrix of power, a covert carceral system designed to "foster and encourage the [useful] subjects of [a] feminist transformation" (Culley, et. al, 19). Boundaries are not blurred; oppositional ideology is not called into question. There is no letting up of what Cixous calls the "masculine urge to judge, diagnose, digest, name" ("Castration" 51). The job of the pedagogue is to bring and keep student language/though within the lines of

[2] The allusion here is to Irigaray's "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other," in *Signs* (1981): 7 (11), where the Mother feeds the child excessively, and the child finds herself immobilized.

legitimacy.

The Proper is continually erected and protected, and in these "feminist" pedagogies, it is erected and protected by the *Mother*, a (not-at-all "benign") authority figure *par excellence* (albeit incognito). S/he represents what Kathryn Morgan has called the "bearded mother" (Gore 68) and what Freud has dubbed the "Phallic Mother." S/he is the Mother endowed with the power of the Father, the "feminine" erected by the "masculine": she is the "*ph*eminine." Under the guise of the "Good Mother," this pedagogue *lovingly* nurtures her students into Proper ways of knowing, thinking, and problem solving. The Mother plays and requires the students to play the game of the Father: erecting the big (Proper) (re)solution. She is the subtle personification of the caricature on the cover of Keuls' book: "Female phallic aggression." And she retains her authority precisely through her ability to conceal the fact that she has it.

What these feminist pedagogies offer is a simple reversal of privilege, from the *Father* to the *Mother*: what Jean Baudrillard has called "the phallic fable reversed" (16). But such a reversal, I would argue, leads us no where new. Since, as Kaja Silverman notes, the "'mother' and the 'father' are binary terms within a closed system of signification[,] each sustains its value and meaning through its relation to the other" (182). The Mother, in fact, is no closer to a feminine space than the Father--she is a creation, a function of the same structures of power, the same "scepter of sovereignty" (Keuls 2). In fact, Foucault reminds us that "power is tolerable only on the condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms" (*History of Sexuality* 86). Power--the Phallus--is not ever where we expect it to be. If, as Lacan argues, the phallus "can play its role only when veiled" (288), Kristeva may be right when she suggests that the Phallic Mother is even more dangerous than the Primitive Father precisely because her phallus *is always* veiled.

It is naive, Irigaray notes, to believe that one need only be a woman to "remain outside phallic power" (81). Feminists who aim for a simple "change in the distribution of power, leaving intact the power structure itself. . .are resubjecting themselves, deliberately or not, to a phallocratic order" (81). Trading one totality for another, the mother's "good authority" for the father's "bad authority," "amounts to the same thing in the end" (68); it amounts "to sameness, to phallocentrism" (33). Cixous argues that women who simply appropriate the power of the phallus

will ultimately find themselves bound by "the same handcuffs, baubles, and chains. Which castration do you prefer," she asks, "the father's or the mother's?" ("Laugh" 263). A return to the myth of maternal wholeness, to the Phallic Mother, will not save us from the Law of the Father; one is as phallogocentric as its other. Liberation will not be attained by trading one('s) Truth for another('s), by playing well the same old "ball" game, so to speak. This game cannot fail to be reactionary, fueled by what Nietzsche calls *resentiment*, motivated by what Freire has termed the "oppressor within"; this so-called liberation is equivalent to being made proper, to appropriating the power of the Proper, and it leaves us as bound and gagged as ever.

What is needed is a different game entirely, a way out of the old stories, out of Oedipal subjectivity, out of the binary system itself. What is needed is a third position beyond the authoritative father and the nurturing mother, beyond the action and the reaction. Not a sequential third, however; it's not that the third option is a "charm," or the "Final Solution." Rather, as Victor Vitanza suggests, this is a radically other third, a paratactical counting experience, what he calls 1, 2, and "some more." Vitanza terms this a Nietzschean "aesthetics of excess," of affirmation. Both of the first two positions must negate the "other" side of the binary to affirm their own. But this third position advocates excess: it "de-negates" the negative through an affirmation of not only both of these but also "some more" positions. Vitanza calls this "dissoi-paralogoi" or "polylogoi": an "atopos of excess" that allows for affirmation and a non-reactionary resistance and disruption in the form of dispersion ("Neopragmatism" 35; see also Vitanza's "'Some More' Notes"). It is a space in which we have what Vitanza calls a "dis-solving [of] our collective fascination with and toward negation itself" ("On Negation" 19). This is a wild, extra-moral affirmation that seeks to dissolve conflicts rather than to solve them (20).

From here, liberation itself can be radically redescribed. "What organize, imprison, [and] censure, are models," Cixous reminds us, "ready-made structures into which one pours all that is still fermenting in order to congeal it" ("Rethinking" 71). It is our unquestioned models that enslave us. They force us to coagulate, like the fat that rises to the top of the soup and hardens, unable to disperse, disseminate, dispense itself. Freedom from such congealment requires a dedication to "severe suspicion" and an active throwing off of models in what Nietzsche calls the "will to shed" (*Gay Science* 37). Freedom becomes a self-overcoming in the form of shedding our

own convictions, our own throwness into inherited language games, inherited binaries, and their inherited problems. Dissolving category restrictions leaves us free to venture unprotected into an "abyss of linguistic seduction" (Baudrillard 57), to dare its game and allow it to whisk us beyond the Proper limits of signification.

For Nietzsche, what catapults us out of society's troubling dualisms is not the possibility of reacting to a "hostile external" but rather of becoming "incapable of taking one's enemies, one's accidents, even one's own misdeeds seriously for very long" (*Genealogy of Morals* 10). Nietzsche's freedom is achieved through laughter: The realm of the Proper "has at present," he says, "only one kind of real enemy capable of harming it: the comedians" (*Genealogy of Morals* 160). Comedy alone challenges ideals because it doesn't take faith in The Truth seriously anymore. Nietzsche's laughter vacates common places, sheds convictions, and opens possibilities. He calls it a "golden laughter" that laughs in a "superhuman and new way--and at the expense of all serious things" (*Beyond Good and Evil* #295). This is a tactical laughter that involves a letting go, for the moment, of our topological crutch, so that we might be set adrift in an abyss of language and experience the vertigo of its unbound excess. A "feminine" pedagogy might well be a pedagogy of such laughter, of overflowing and liberating feminine hilarity that would hurl us into excessively affirmative third subject positions.

But here "the feminine" is not an inherently female property or simply the opposite of "the masculine." It is that radical other in itself that won't be restricted by binaries, that can't be defined or categorized. It's not the "feminine" as in nature opposed to culture, pathos opposed to logos, mother opposed to father--that's the *ph*eminine. Rather, it is precisely that element of reversibility that blurs the conventional distinctions between each of these gendered dichotomies. It is what Baudrillard calls an "insoluble" space, where "the very distinction between authenticity and artifice is without foundation" (11), a radical space that can't be brought in or ac/counted for. This space has been called "the feminine" (by Nietzsche, Baudrillard, Derrida, Cixous, Irigaray, Jardine, etc.) because it is always already excluded from the phallo-logical enterprise: Woman constitutes the "unrepresentable," "unconstrainable," and "undesignatable" (Butler 9). However, here Woman--the feminine--is a *post*-gendered third position that is, as Jardine notes, "beyond the Father, overflowing the dialectics of Representation" (138). A feminine laughter would cut loose

from this space.

And it would fly beyond the laughter that Susan Jarratt has recently advocated. Though I celebrate her "serious decision to use humor in [her] feminist classroom," a pedagogy of laughter would radicalize that approach. Jarratt uses humor to "lighten the burden of relentless critique" (317), but she never indicates to her students that feminism is not something to be taken "seriously." A "feminine" laughter, on the other hand, *would be* the relentless critique, against which nothing would be protected. Inasmuch as feminism exists as a reaction against masculism, the two operate out of the same historical conditions of possibility, the same deep structures from which we turn to laughter for extrication. Judith Butler has said, "laughter in the face of serious categories is indispensable to feminism" (x); but "feminism" may itself be too serious a category: it may itself be in need of a good, catapulting chortle.

A feminine laughter would make no distinction between the action and the reaction, between, for instance, masculism and feminism's answer to it. It would recognize no politically correct position, and it would not attempt to "play being against being" or "truth against truth" (Baudrillard 10). A feminine laughter would act as a purgative, affirming, as Vitanza does, "just vomiting,"[3] spitting up the Proper and its rationalism in an attempt to "expel expulsion" itself ("Neopragmatism" 2). It would answer Cixous' call for a "disgorging," a metaphorical "throwing up" of the "basic structures of property relations" ("Castration" 54) to free us for an excessive affirmation beyond the false clarity of the either/or choice. It would make a place for what Moi calls a free-flowing and "orgastic interchange with the other" (113), for a heterosexual relation that appreciates differences without the need to name, classify, and purify. And it would leave us in a dangerous, unprotected space, with no set boundaries, where no/thing would be excluded, censored, or negated[4], where every attempt to reduce difference to sameness would be dispersed

[3] Vitanza is punning on the word "just" in much the way Lyotard does in his *Just Gaming*. It should call to mind not only "just," as in the sense of "justice" or "proper" but also as in "only" or "merely." The use of the word itself sets the meanings against each other, not to cancel each other out so much as to call the adequacy of either into question.

[4] See Martin Heidegger's "What Are Poets For?" (91-144), for an exploration of Being as a turning toward the "Open," the abyss, the wide open, unmarked territory that is unrestricted possibility. "Shielding" is equivalent to all of the category restrictions that provide for us a safe haven of meaning. Poets, Heidegger says, are

by "cutting up."[5]

A pedagogy of laughter would mimic phallic authority in the classroom in a way that would pervert its authenticity; authority would find itself enacted as a pedagogical performance--a parody or pastiche--informed by the notion that we cannot be masters of a language that commands us. Authority would not be renounced, rather, it would be enacted in a way that would expose its illusoriness: it would become laughable. It would be performed, but it could not be seized. Jane Gallop has suggested that this type of mimicry is a type of "infidelity, like marital infidelity, that operates within an institution to ruin it" ("Daughters" 48). But "ruin" is too harsh a term here. In a pedagogy of laughter, authority would simply get mercilessly teased, exposed, critiqued, so that the distinction between castrated other and the subject presumed to know would seem less and less distinct.

The role of the writer in this space where there is no possibility of seizing phallic authority would undergo a radical transformation. A *laughing* pedagogue would invite students to disrupt their own positions, to contradict themselves, to expose all that must be hidden and excluded in the precious name of clarity. S/he would invite students to be severely suspicious of any seemingly serious or transparent communication, to point up the unsuppressible dark-side of their own discourse, and to violate linearity and the Law of Noncontradiction in what Worsham calls the "discursive equivalent of laughter" (89). Writers, in this space, are writers-cum-laughers.

A feminine laughter would always already be turning back on itself, laughing at itself laughing. Nietzsche says that "to laugh *out of the whole truth*" necessitates laughing at oneself (*Gay* 74), at one's Self, acknowledging one's own subject positions, doing what Vitanza does: "hamming" one's "selp!is" ("Neopragmatism" 29). As feminists, we have not laughed enough--we have certainly not laughed at ourselves enough. Irigaray suggests that the "first form of liberation from a secular oppression" is laughter (163). Nietzsche writes that it is "precisely because we are at bottom grave and serious human beings. . .[that] nothing does us as much good as a fool's cap"

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those willing to shed their protection and venture into the Open *unshielded*. These are also those Nietzsche would say are on their way to "becoming who they are."

[5] This is in reference to Michel Foucault's "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," where he says: "knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for *cutting*" (my emphasis, 154). The link between cutting and cutting up has been made several times by Vitanza.

(*Gay* 107). Cixous's muse is the re/visioned Medusa because "[s]he's beautiful and she's *laughing*" (my emphasis "Laughter" 885); and laughter, Cixous tells us, can "break up the [so-called] truth" (888) and "knock the wind out of the codes" (882). This kind of laughter can fling us into a space beyond boundaries, beyond the limits of the Proper. Getting in touch with what Cixous calls "the rhythm that laughs us" ("Laughter" 882) could save us from what Donna Haraway terms the "Moral Majority within" (190). Inviting students to "fall about laughing," to "ham it up," to shed their inherited need to fix meaning and erect solutions, would be to invite them to test the boundaries of the Proper and, perhaps, to begin to think precisely what formal education aims to make unthinkable. It would be to invite students to dis/cover a non-reactionary resistance that cannot be engulfed by the Power of the Proper, to locate post-Oedipal, post-gendered subject positions capable of affirming incommensurabilities, and to celebrate their own ability to dance with no Proper ground under their feet.

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